



Good, Bad, and Ugly: Comparing Thesis Statements

Sharing thesis statements with students, both good and bad, can help them understand the characteristics they should be striving for in their own work. Share the following thesis statements with your students. Ask them to brainstorm possible problems or positive characteristics of each. Keep in mind that even the “best” thesis statements are a work in progress!

	Needs Improvement	Better	Good
Susan B. Anthony	<p>Why was Susan B. Anthony so important in history?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>This is a question, not a statement.</i> <i>Lacks the author's opinion. What are you trying to prove?</i> <i>Needs to be more specific about her impact in history.</i> <i>Needs theme connection.</i> 	<p>Susan B. Anthony fought for the right to vote. The 19th amendment was passed in 1919.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Needs to do more than state a fact.</i> <i>Needs more information about Anthony's own role and its significance in history.</i> <i>Needs theme connection.</i> 	<p>Through social action and her writings, Susan B. Anthony inspired thousands to take a stand of the issue of suffrage, which fueled the women's rights revolution and eventually resulted in the 19th amendment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Discusses significance in history.</i> <i>Specific about means and ends.</i> <i>Has a connection to the theme.</i>
Martin Luther	<p>Martin Luther was born in 1483. He started the Reformation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Needs to do more than state a fact.</i> <i>Needs a theme connection.</i> <i>So what? Needs to discuss significance of Reformation.</i> 	<p>Despite opposition, Martin Luther used his 95 theses to take a stand against the Roman Catholic Church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>So what? Needs to discuss the outcome and significance of his actions in history.</i> <i>Needs theme connection.</i> 	<p>Martin Luther took action against certain aspects of Roman Catholic religious practices through his 95 theses, which sparked a religious revolution, inspired a new sect of faith, and later motivated reform in the Roman Catholic Church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Discusses actions and significance.</i> <i>Has a connection to theme.</i>
Chemical Warfare	<p>The use of chemical warfare during World War I was wrong.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Needs to do more than just state an opinion.</i> <i>Needs a theme connection.</i> 	<p>The introduction of chemical warfare during World War I was a revolution in warfare. It prompted countries to use new tactics and develop new equipment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Connects to the theme.</i> <i>Could move beyond just new technology. What are some of the more significant impacts of this topic?</i> 	<p>The use of chlorine gas at Ypres in 1915 by the German Empire represented a revolution in modern warfare, prompting reforms in the use of chemical warfare through the Geneva Protocol.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Has a theme connection.</i> <i>Discusses impact in history.</i>
Earth Day	<p>Earth Day was first celebrated in April 1970 and we still celebrate it today.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Needs to do more than state a fact.</i> <i>Needs a theme connection.</i> <i>So what? Needs to discuss the impact that Earth Day has had in history.</i> 	<p>Earth Day was a revolution for the environment and changed everything!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Has a theme connection!</i> <i>Needs to be more specific about the impact of the topic.</i> <i>Can we connect it to larger issues in history?</i> 	<p>Beginning as a teach-in about environmental issues, Earth Day represented the reaction of many people to changes in the environment and increased public and governmental demand for reform about the environment, making the start of the modern environmental movement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Has a theme connection.</i> <i>Discusses significance.</i>

Adapted from NHD Wisconsin.